

**Sermon – Bath Abbey,
Trinity Sunday 30th May 2021
James Playfair and Nigel Rawlinson – Reaching the Unreached**

Nigel – this is the first talk for one of the charities in the Abbey Pentecost Appeal. It is the start of a series to inform us about our Abbey mission. James is here to inform us about **India**, and **Reaching The Unreached (RTU)**

James - The situation in India, as we have all seen, continues to be very serious, and we will come back to the Covid crisis there shortly.

But first to set the scene - India is a country of many colours and contrasts:

Colours:

- From the ice-cold glaciers and mountains of the Himalayas – a Sanskrit word for snow abode
- to the teeming, steaming heat of the south, and a land of paddy fields, palm groves, oxen pulling the ploughs. RTU is in the southernmost state of India

Contrasts:

- from the palaces of the princes, the skyscrapers, the financial and IT centres of the big cities, such as Mumbai, Bangalore
- to life between the rail tracks and the Dahravi slum – also, as it happens, in Mumbai

But then also – India – is a country of chance:

- there's serendipity - a lovely word, from Sanskrit again, word for golden island, a word we use – meaning a chance event which turns out well.

Nigel, I know we are all exhausted. It has been tough. Compassion fatigue sometimes makes it harder to engage with other issues. However, please hear about RTU, in a continent really in trouble with Covid...

James

- But chance is not always so beautiful a thing or such good fortune. For the individual in India the contrast of life chances would be between the Mughal princes in history and the maharajahs – and those born into the lower castes
- *Today* - the lower castes and the poor have a life with the uncertainty of day-labour, dreadful wages, a basic and meagre diet, a poor supply of fresh water, poor housing and poor health
- and now on top of all that, the Covid pandemic

It is *with-in* these rural communities, remote but hectic (as all of India is), primitive but with mobiles, and poverty *that one cannot imagine from here* – that you will find **Reaching The Unreached (RTU)** - their main base, the children's villages, the schools, the new houses.

You will find more about RTU in the leaflets to take away - an Easter 2021 edition, and sadly already in present circumstances out of date. The same happened with the Zoom conversation that we had with Fr Anthony, director of RT. It is also out of date, as these rural communities are being overtaken by the events of the Covid Pandemic

And despite losing members of staff or family members of staff, at RTU, they are doing their best, and in a moment Fr A from K will tell us about it.

And whilst we watch him, we should wonder, ask ourselves and think:

- What's the chance here? Was it only just chance?
- How is it that they are there - in and among those people?
- What was it that led Brother James to settle in that place, and to look after so many orphaned children over all the years – to build houses, schools, to divine for water,
- to care for the sick, to be there for the HIV crisis
- and now to be there for Covid

How is it that the Abbey knows about this at all? Was it just *by chance*? Some say it must have been – but was it? We are saying it is something more than that?

Video – Fr Anthony

Messages

- The start
- Many early members have new adult lives as workers, parents and working members
- And they are helping communities cope with covid

Nigel:

There once was a young boy walking along a beautiful beach, just after high tide. There were many starfish stranded on the sand as the sea receded. As he walked along, he picked up the star fish at his feet and threw them back into the sea. Someone came up to him and said, “what are you doing”. “I am saving starfish”. The man replied, “but you cannot save all these”. The boy said, “Yes I know. But I can make a difference for the ones I find.”

Today is Trinity Sunday. I love this day. We think of our God – the wonder and mystery... It is as if we look at our God from different angles...

- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- Father - creator; Son - redeemer; Holy Spirit – enabler and life giver
- The symbol of three rings interlinked (like the Olympic rings)
- The Rublev Icon – a faith painting - the three figures interlinked by the acknowledging tilt of their heads and eye gaze
- <https://www.soulshpherd.org/enjoy-the-hospitality-of-the-trinity-with-rublevs-icon/>

Three persons – all equal, of one substance... of one God.

The Gospel reading today – so well known – includes an interesting translation footnote. Some commentators feel that the words of Jesus end at verse 15. The quotation marks should be there. So, verse 16 and 17 are John's, Spirit-guided comments:

For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

I think that this is right, and sounds so strong. Verse 16 is often taught as a foundation verse for faith. Verse 17 is a glorious word of hope.

As Christians we overflow with hope by the power of the Spirit. Paul prays this for us: *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Spirit.* (Romans 15: 13)

We experience this. Have you ever had a chance encounter, with friend or stranger, a comment made that settles something – a worry or query - on your mind? Well, that is the Holy Spirit. The person meeting you was overflowing, whether they knew it or not. God reached you by his Spirit through that person. In the same way, we can be filled to overflowing, and God reaches others through us, whether we know it or not. We can pray Romans 15: 13 in the first person... "God of hope, please fill me..."

And it was the Holy Spirit who guided Brother James Kimpton to go to India and set up RTU. Think of the lives RTU has transformed. So that is not chance. It is the guidance and blessing the Holy Spirit.

So let us be encouraged by the work of RTU, and in the same way, wherever we are, whatever age we are, we can be channels for the Holy Spirit. We are all part of the hope that we have.

John 3: 17 - there is much to do.

Amen

JNR
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